

# A Healthy Mouth for Your Baby



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES  
National Institutes of Health

Healthy teeth are important—  
even baby teeth. Children need healthy  
teeth to help them chew and to speak clearly.  
And baby teeth hold space for adult teeth. This  
booklet can help you keep your baby's mouth  
healthy and give him a healthy start!



# A Healthy Mouth for Your Baby



1. Protect your baby's teeth with fluoride.
2. Check and clean your baby's teeth.
3. Feed your baby healthy food.
4. Don't put your baby to bed with a bottle.
5. Take your child to the dentist by age 1.



Ann and her friend Maria were watching Maria's children play.

"What are you doing?" asked Ann.

"I'm cleaning my baby's teeth," said Maria.

"But your baby hardly has any teeth!" said Ann.

"Yes, but the dentist said there are things I can do to keep my baby from getting cavities," said Maria.

"But don't baby teeth just fall out?" asked Ann.

"Yes, but before they fall out baby teeth can decay and cause pain for the baby. And baby teeth are important—they hold space for adult teeth," said Maria.

“What else did the dentist say?” asked Ann.

“She told me that fluoride protects teeth. She also said to feed my baby healthy foods and not to put my baby to bed with a bottle,” said Maria.

“When do you have to start taking care of a baby’s teeth?” asked Ann.

“As soon as they come in. Teeth can start to decay as soon as they appear in the mouth,” said Maria.

“I’ll have to start thinking of those things soon!” said Ann.



# 1

## Protect your baby's teeth with fluoride.

**Fluoride** (said like *floor-eyed*) protects teeth from tooth decay. It can even heal early decay.

Fluoride is in the drinking water of many towns and cities.

Ask a dentist or doctor if your water has fluoride in it. If it doesn't, ask about other kinds of fluoride (such as fluoride varnish or drops) that can help keep your baby's teeth healthy.





## Check and clean your baby's teeth.

### **CHECK** your baby's teeth.

Healthy teeth should be all one color. If you see spots or stains on the teeth, take your baby to a dentist.

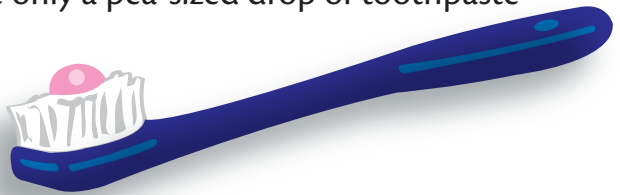
### **CLEAN** your baby's teeth.

Clean them as soon as they come in with a clean, soft cloth or a baby's toothbrush. Clean the teeth at least once a day. It's best to clean them right before bedtime.



At about age 2 (or sooner if a dentist or doctor suggests it) you should start putting fluoride toothpaste on your child's toothbrush. Use only a pea-sized drop of toothpaste about as big as this—

Young children cannot get their teeth clean by themselves. Until they are 7 or 8 years old, you will need to help them brush. Try brushing their teeth first and then letting them finish.



# 3

## Feed your baby healthy food.

- ✓ Choose foods without a lot of sugar in them.
- ✓ Give your child fruits and vegetables for snacks.
- ✓ Save cookies and other treats for special occasions.





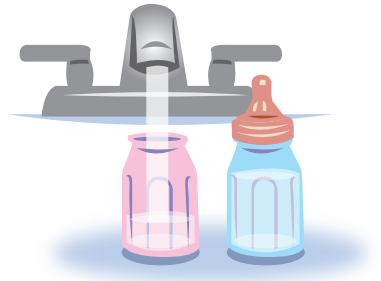


## Don't put your baby to bed with a bottle.

Milk, formula, juice, and other drinks such as soda all have sugar in them. If sugary liquids stay on your baby's teeth too long, it can lead to tooth decay. (And decayed teeth can cause pain for your baby.)

### What's one of the most important things you can do to keep your baby from getting cavities?

Avoid putting him to bed with a bottle—at night or at nap time. (If you do put your baby to bed with a bottle, fill it only with water.)



### Here are some other things you can do:

- ✓ Between feedings, don't give your baby a bottle or sippy cup filled with sweet drinks to carry around.
- ✓ Near his first birthday, teach your child to drink from an open cup.
- ✓ If your baby uses a pacifier, don't dip it in anything sweet like sugar or honey.



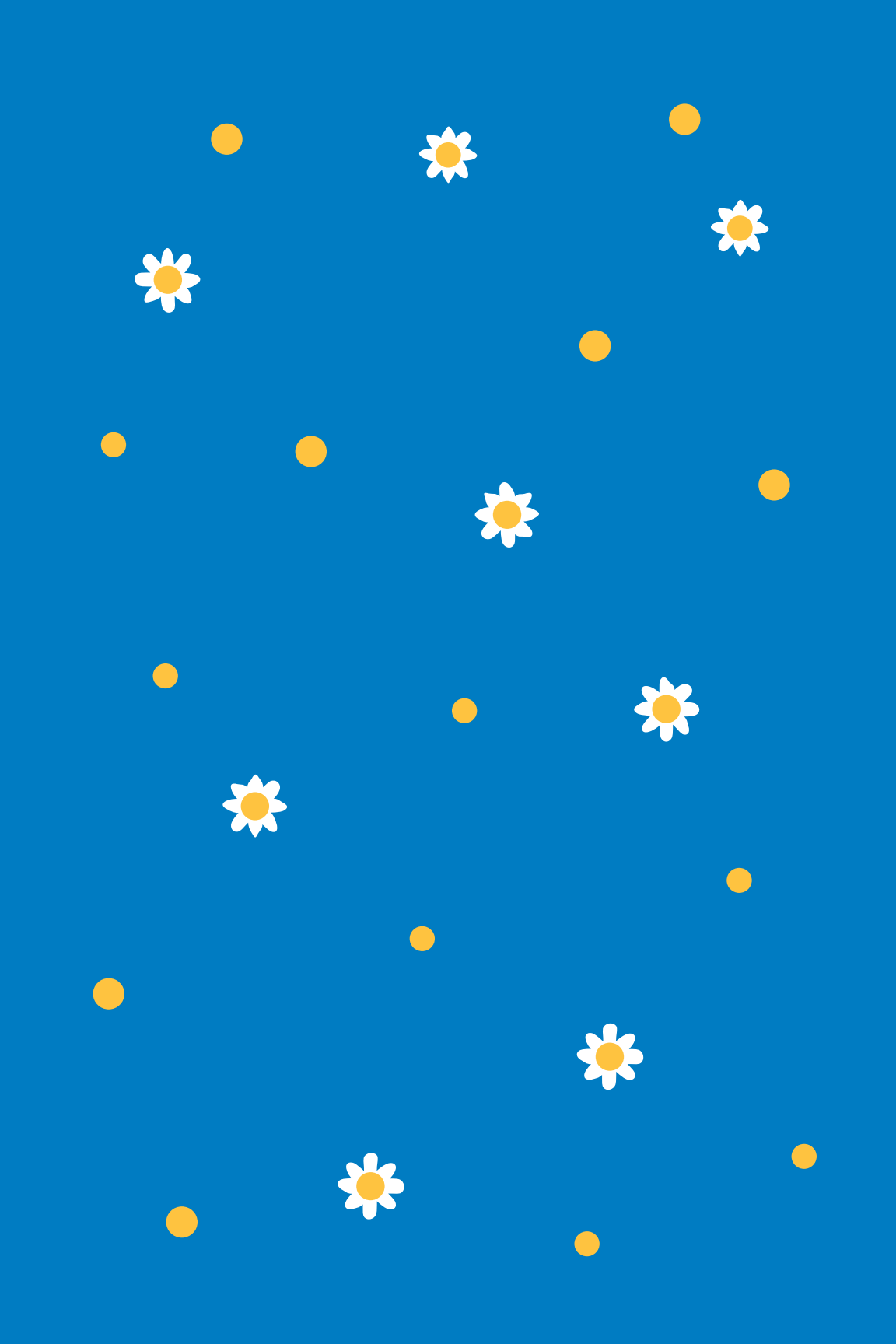
## 5

# Take your child to the dentist.

Your child should have a dental visit by his first birthday.  
At this visit, the dentist will:

- ✓ Check your child's teeth.
- ✓ Show you the best way to clean your child's teeth.
- ✓ Talk to you about other things such as a healthy diet and fluoride that can keep your child's mouth healthy.





**For additional copies of  
this booklet, contact:**

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